



News Release

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For Immediate Release

World War II Veteran Receives Purple Heart Medal 59 years later

When World War II Army veteran Roy Helein served his country in Germany, Belgium, France and England he was busy worrying about staying safe and getting home to his new bride Dorothy Helein in Chicago. Just three days after they were married, Roy Helein was shipped out overseas.

He entered the Army as a volunteer in March of 1943 and during his two years of service he earned some medals along the way. But back then they paled in comparison to the wife he left behind. When his discharge papers were handed to him, he hastily signed. His thoughts were already back in Chicago with Dorothy.

But on Monday, November 17th his Army service will be brought back to the forefront when his family helps to honor him at a special VA Ceremony held at 11:20 a.m. at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center Ambulatory Care Center NW and SW Conference rooms on the basement level on the northeast corner of Third Street and Indian School Road.

A special medal presentation is being coordinated between VA and Helein's family since Helein is a VA patient.

The medal presentation comes 59 years after the fact and has a unique story to it, one of a father sharing thoughts with his son about his service in World War II.

For many years Roy Helein never spoke of his time in the service, but one day he started speaking about his war stories to his son Michael Helein. At that time, he mentioned that he never received his Purple Heart. He told Michael his story:

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The Carl T. Hayden Veterans Affairs Medical Center has been serving veterans in Maricopa County since 1951. We are a level one tertiary care facility that offers a variety of services to more than 50,000 veterans. We currently have 150 inpatient beds for medical and surgical patients, 110 beds for nursing home patients and 48 inpatient beds for mental health patients. We are actively involved in training new medical and surgical residents to become certified physicians and are committed to medical research to help find cures for illness and disease. We are honored to serve our veterans.

Helein Medals

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“I was wounded while shooting at a Tiger Tank that the Germans thought would win them the war. It was their version of our Sherman tank, but with twice as much metal. One rolled in on my unit on a foggy day, so I grabbed the bazooka and fired at it. Unfortunately it bounced off the turret and the Germans were able to trace the smoke from my bazooka and fired right back.

Their fire hit my ammunition stash in the foxhole and buried me. I suffered a concussion. If it wasn't for my fellow comrade, who took off his helmet and started digging me out of the hole, my story may have a different ending.”

After hearing this story Michael thought he'd put his dad in for that medal. What Michael later learned was that during that war period it was difficult for officers to really determine who was deserving of medals. Since Helein was processed in and out of the hospital so quickly, the documentation didn't follow.

So Michael started filling out the right paperwork only to find out that his father's documentation for the medal was lost due to a fire in the St. Louis VA records center.

But Michael was persistent and kept requesting documentation. After three years of writing letters and making phone calls, he turned to Senator John McCain's office for help and they provided much needed assistance. They suggested that Michael start forming his own proof. He went through his mother's letters that her husband Roy wrote while he was deployed. Amongst them Michael found a citation for a Bronze Star for shooting at the Tiger Tank, being wounded and capturing Germans. So Michael shared the document with staff at the St. Louis VA office. They accepted it as proof. From there the medals were awarded in three months, not the three years that was anticipated due to Senator McCain's intervention.

“I just wasn't going to give up,” says Michael Helein. “I just wanted him to get his Purple Heart.”

To Michael's surprise his father was also given five other medals to present to his father. The Army of Occupation Medal with Germany clasp, American Campaign Medal, WWII Victory Medal, the Belgian Fourragere/French Croix De Guerre, and the Purple Heart, with a “v” device, which is denoted by adding an oak leaf cluster.

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Helein Medals

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Roy Helein is a Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center patient. So his son thought he'd enlist the VA for help in the presentation. In so doing, the staff embraced the concept and decided to make it a special part of an employee ceremony honoring veterans that the Special Emphasis Committee is holding on Monday November 17th. All five medals will be presented during the ceremony on Monday and many veterans and VA staff will be on hand to help honor Helein.

"We're thrilled with the opportunity to honor our patient, his family and our employees who are veterans," said Jeanett Robinson, Special Emphasis Committee chairman. We're honored to serve our veterans and this presentation will add a special touch that we're happy to have," she added.

And for the Helein family, it will also be a special event. "Our family is so proud to see our father receive the Purple Heart. Today we, as a family, get to share in this proud moment in history," said Michael Helein.

Helein's family will bring photographs, the citation and other memorabilia to share with those attending the ceremony. The VA hopes it will be a special tribute to both patients and staff who have taken the time to serve our country.

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